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Fig. 1.—FRAGMENT OF A BAS-RELIEF IN STUCCO.

THE ANTIQUE MURAL PAINTINGS AND STUCCOS DISCOVERED NEAR THE FARNESINA.



Fig. 2.—FRAGMENT OF A BAS-RELIEF
IN STUCCO.

YOU asked me to give you some account of the important mural paintings brought to light in the course of the excavations in the bed and along the banks of the Tiber, but it has been impossible for me until now to respond to your request, owing to the difficulties which I encountered in endeavoring to procure photographs of the frescos and stuccos, without which, it seemed to me, my information would have remained incomplete. Having finally succeeded in obtaining these photographs, I send them to you with the present essay, so that they may enable your readers, the archæologists and the lovers of art in America, to form a concise idea of this marvellous discovery.

It may be affirmed without a moment's hesitation, and without the least exaggeration, that these paintings constitute a "find" of the first order, which will mark one of the culminating points in the history of antique art in the Eternal City. And I wish it to be understood that I do not say this simply in view of the very limited number of mural paintings thus far found in Rome and its environs: the fact remains true, even if we bear in mind all the monuments of this kind now known. For the paintings on the banks of the Tiber far surpass, in refinement of taste, as well as in skill of execution, the most beautiful frescos found in Pompeii and in Herculaneum, and demonstrate the difference which existed between the mansions of the rich patricians of the capital and the dwelling-houses in even the most important of the secondary cities. This discovery, indeed, has surpassed all that it seemed possible to imagine.

I may pride myself upon having, at an opportune moment, called the attention of the Italian government and of the learned to the importance of examining the Tiber, and on having pro-

posed the archæological exploration of the bed of the river, at the bottom of which there must certainly be hidden treasures of incomparable value, whether they be considered from an artistic or from an historical point of view. In 1870, when the necessity of taking serious steps for the protection of the capital of Italy from the continual peril of inundation began to be talked of, I published a number of letters in the papers, and secured the co-operation of several competent gentlemen in my endeavors to persuade the government to order regular excavations to be made in the bed of the river, before the mines and the dredging machines had had time to destroy the precious monuments heaped up within its borders as in a casket. What had happened in other cities situated on rivers led me to hope for important and exceptional results in this city of Rome, which for centuries was the capital of the whole world; and the observations made on the progressive elevation of the ground were sufficient to establish in my mind the firm belief that, by a careful and systematic exploration of the bed of the Tiber, we should find, layer upon layer, as in turning over the leaves of a book, a connected series of historical and

artistic documents of inestimable value.

I should never reach the end, if I were to try to recount here, one by one, the difficulties which opposed my project. I have now the satisfaction of being able to say that the occasional excavations which became necessary as the work of enlargement proceeded, demonstrated in the most convincing manner the desirability of a complete exploration. Weapons thrown away during the later risings against the Papal government previous to 1870, coins of Pius IX. and of the Popes who preceded him, quantities of tools and utensils of divers metals, counterfeit coins,

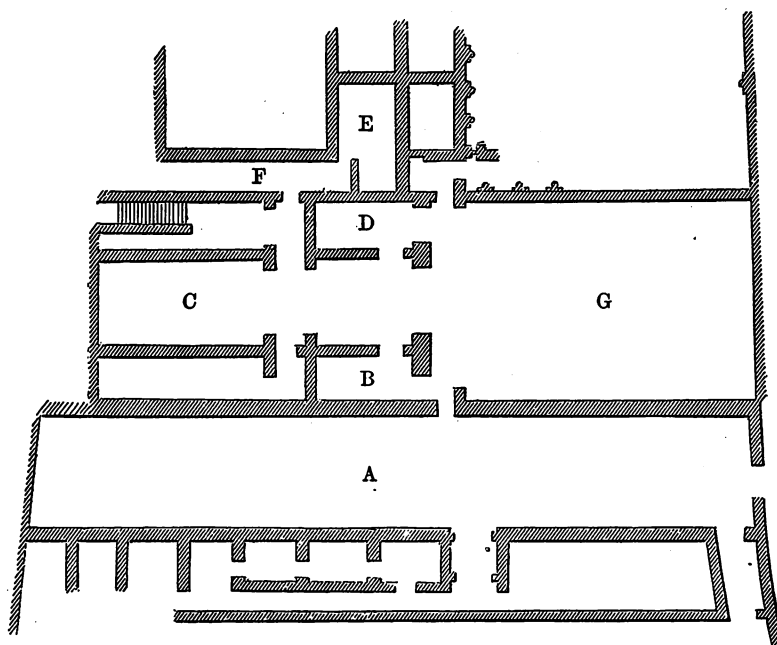


Fig. 3. — GROUND PLAN. — Scale 1 : 400.

stamped leads, precious vases, superb fragments of glass,—these are some of the objects already found. In one place, where the dredging-machines happened to go below the usual depth, there were found pieces of agate and of amethyst, fragments of statuettes and of inscriptions, liturgic objects, etc. As the dredgers do not penetrate to any very great depth, we have not yet been able to reach the more ancient deposits of the classical epoch.

In the account of the excavations communicated to the Academy of the *Lincci* by Senator Fiorelli, the inscriptions were reproduced, and a number of them were again published last year in the Bulletin of the Roman Archæological Commission, so that it is possible to estimate their historical interest. Several of them, of the greatest importance for the topography of the ancient city, allude to the restoration of the bridge of Valentinian (the present Ponte Sisto) under the Lower Empire, when a triumphal arch was erected at the entrance to the bridge, surmounted by two colossal statues in bronze, of which numerous fragments have been found, together with the marble pedestal of one of them, with the feet still attached to it.¹ This restoration or reconstruction of the bridge must have taken place between the years 366 and 367 of our era. As before said, I would never have dared to hope that it might be possible to reach such results, so useful to topographical and historical studies, in the course of these restricted excavations.

¹ *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*, Anno VI., No. 4, p. 241 et seq.—Fiorelli, *Notizie degli Scavi*, November, 1878.

I will also cite the inscriptions which were found in the progress of the work at the *Emporio*. One of these mentions the corporation of the wine merchants, which, under the protection of Bacchus and of Mercury, owned the storehouses called *cellæ Arruntianæ et novæ*, situated on the same spot where, so many hundreds of years later, the banker Agostino Chigi was to build the palace and to lay out the gardens of the Farnesina,¹ outside the walls of the city. Of this commercial establishment, which, according to the inscription, was still in existence in the year 102 of our era, many traces have been found, fragments of the columns of the porch, and great vases (*dolia*), several of which, in a good state of preservation, still show the mark of the manufacturer.²

These discoveries were made at the depth of about three metres below the present surface, on the river-side, where the commerce in question was carried on by means of boats. A little farther on, in the direction of the Vatican, were found the ruins of the structures which made the banks of the Tiber so delightful, and at the other extremity of the garden, only a short distance from the stream, and at a depth of about five metres, the workmen came upon some walls *ad opus reticulatum*, decorated with paintings of extreme delicacy.

It will easily be seen that this discovery offers a most striking proof of the rise in the level of the river. But I shall not stop to insist on the value of this very evident demonstration, as my present purpose is to call your attention to the artistic beauties of the frescos and stuccos found in the excavated buildings.

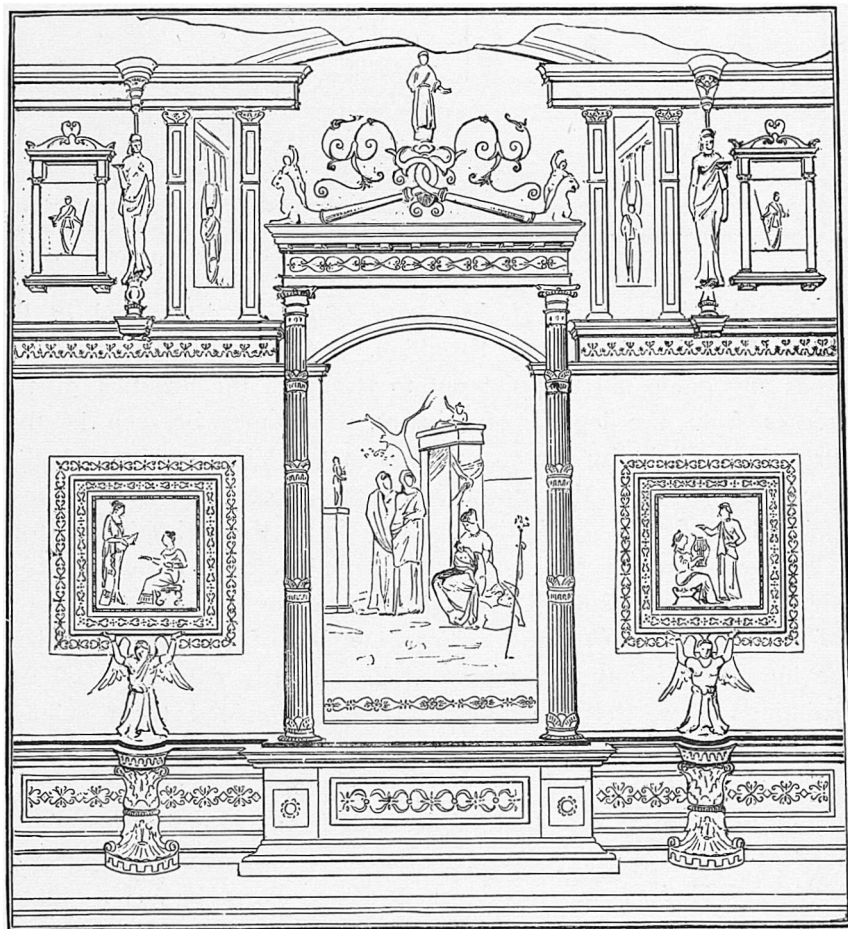


Fig. 4. — DIAGRAM OF REAR WALL IN CHAMBER B.

Antique mural paintings are rarely found in Rome. Nor will this fact cause astonishment when we consider the numberless vicissitudes to which the soil of the Eternal City has been exposed. Rome differs in this respect from Herculaneum and Pompeii. In these cities everything was preserved in such a marvellous way as almost to lead one to believe that the events which led to their destruction occurred so that posterity, after hundreds of years, might be able to form some idea of the grand style of painting in the classical epoch of antiquity from the exquisite beauty of the work done by mere house-painters. But however that may be, we may still say, in spite of the small number of mural paintings left to us in Rome, that the few which do exist represent the best taste of the great capital of antiquity. Who does not remember the

¹ It is well known, of course, that the Farnesina acquired the present name from its later owners, the Farnese family.

² *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale*, Anno VI., No. 2, p. 102. — *Bulletin of the German Archaeological Institute*, Anno 1879, p. 70.

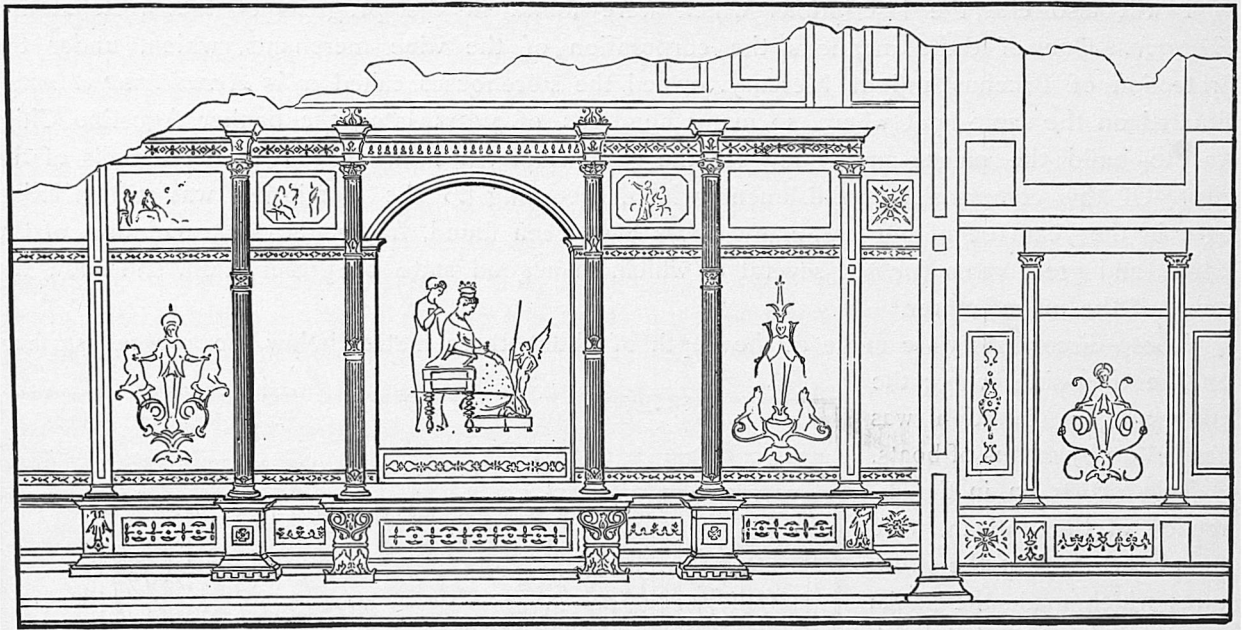


Fig. 5. — DIAGRAM OF PART OF LEFT-HAND WALL IN CHAMBER B.

admirable fresco of the *Aldobrandini Marriage*, discovered in the seventeenth century near the arch of Gallienus, on the Esquiline, and now preserved in the library of the Vatican? Nor does any guide fail to point out to strangers the beauties of the mural paintings, representing scenes from the legend of Ulysses, which may be seen in the same library, and which were brought to light by the excavations in the Via Graziosa. And in 1876 there was discovered in the grounds near the Porta Maggiore a columbarium, with a marvellously preserved frieze painted in fresco, exhibiting scenes from the primitive history of the Latins and Romans. This fresco, which has been commented upon by the most celebrated archæologists, is now shown at the Museum Kircherianum, together with the cinerary urns of the slaves and freedmen of the *Gens Statilia*, and a large number of inscriptions which tell us how the government of an important family was regulated in the early days of the Empire. An examination of these paintings shows that the buildings which contained them belonged to the most illustrious patricians: they indicate, therefore, the culminating point which this art had reached at the time when the Roman world was under the happy influence of the classical epoch. Their merit is not, indeed, inferior to that of the paintings found in the villa at Prima Porta, where the magnificent statue of Augustus was discovered, which is now exhibited in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican. This summer residence at Prima Porta, known as the villa of Livia, where the Imperial family inhaled the fresh air of the country, shows us halls ornamented with paintings of trees and fruit in the style affected by Ludius, the celebrated painter of the time of Augustus,¹ and so perfect in execution that we may well attribute them to the hand of Ludius himself.² They are in no particular inferior to the paintings of the paternal mansion of Tiberius on the Palatine, one of the most important discoveries made in the Farnese Gardens. I dare not affirm that the remains of frescos which still exist in the baths of Titus, or, more properly speaking, in the various ruins left of the house of Nero, can give us an idea of the magnificence and the refinement of the imperial halls of this palace, as described by Suetonius. No one will deny the elegance of the ornaments on the vaulted ceilings, to which, according to a trustworthy tradition, Raphael himself went for inspiration before he composed those sublime *fantasias* which, under the name of *Raffaelesche*, recall to us to-day the works of the great artist of Urbino. The ornamentation, in colored stucco, on the walls of the tombs discovered on the Via Latina in 1857, in the grounds called *Corso*, is decidedly superior to the work of a similar kind in the

¹ Pliny, *H. N.*, XXXV. 116.

² Brunn, *Bull. Inst. Corr. Arch.*, Anno 1863, p. 24.

Stabian baths at Pompeii. The same excavations in the *Corso* also brought to light a sepulchral chamber, the arched ceilings of which, ornamented with medallions containing small figures in relief, all in white stucco, were looked upon as specimens of the perfection of elegance and simplicity.

But of all the paintings and stuccos discovered in Rome, and justly held to be evidences of antique art in its most advanced state, those recently unearthed in the excavations on the banks of the Tiber are the most perfect and the most admirable.



Fig. 6. — DIAGRAM OF PART OF A CEILING, AS RESTORED FROM THE FRAGMENTS.

I shall leave it to Dr. Mau, who has made the Pompeian paintings the subject of extended studies, to discuss the causes which gave origin to this style of painting; and I shall leave it to the topographers of Rome to determine the purpose of this edifice, which remained outside of the city proper, even after the Aurelian wall had been erected in the fourteenth or Transtiberine region. The reticular construction, the style of the stuccos, and the general character of the design, leave no room to doubt that we have before us a work of the time of Augustus, that age of gold when letters and arts flourished in Rome. To aid the reader in understanding the disposition of the building which contains the paintings and stuccos, I here give the plan of the ruins. (See Fig. 3.)

On the 27th of March, 1879, at the depth of about five metres, and almost on the margin of the river, there began to appear a long *ambulacrum* (ambulatory, passage for walking), marked A on the plan, which, on the side towards the Farnesina, led to a series of chambers, still partly provided with their mosaic pavements. One half of this passage was decorated rather simply by means of architectural divisions, with a rectangle enclosing a small figure in the centre of each. In the other half, decorated in a similar but more refined style, there was painted upon the wall a black dado, divided by very elegant colonettes formed of aquatic plants, and by interlacing Cupids. The squares in the centres of the panels in this half were not placed upon a white ground, but were accompanied by small landscapes in color, with animals, of so fine a touch that they surpassed in delicacy the most carefully executed miniatures. In pursuing the excavations in the direction towards the Tiber, the workmen came upon the upper part of a *cubiculum* (bed-chamber), B on the plan, painted throughout in the most vivid colors, and the little subjects which were first brought to light gave a fair idea of the rare beauty of the whole. But hardly had our dazzled eyes begun to admire this treasure of art when the waters of the river, flowing in from all sides, again covered up the ruins, and put a stop to the continuation of the work for more than a month, although all possible means were employed to draw off the water and save the paintings, which it was feared would be irreparably lost. Happily, however, the good quality of the stucco and of the colors enabled them to resist the action of the water; and, when the place had been drained again, our expectations were a thousand times surpassed at sight of this little chamber, which seemed to have been the dwelling-place of a goddess. Imagine the most brilliant vermilion spread everywhere in profusion, greens, yellows, and ultramarines of the purest hue alternating with zones of ivory white, and all these so disposed as to rival in general harmony the most beautiful



THE INFANT BACCHUS.

Antique Mural Painting discovered in the Ruins in the Gardens of the Farnesina.

tapestries of India or Persia. But in this brilliant *ensemble* the beholder gradually picked out a thousand charming details, now admiring the purity of the architectural lines, now going into ecstasies over the luxuriousness of the friezes, which seemed embellished by the finest embroideries, and then, again, wondering at the varied style of the figures and other subjects.

On the wall at the back of the chamber (see Fig. 4) there are three subjects, the largest of which (see full-page illustration)

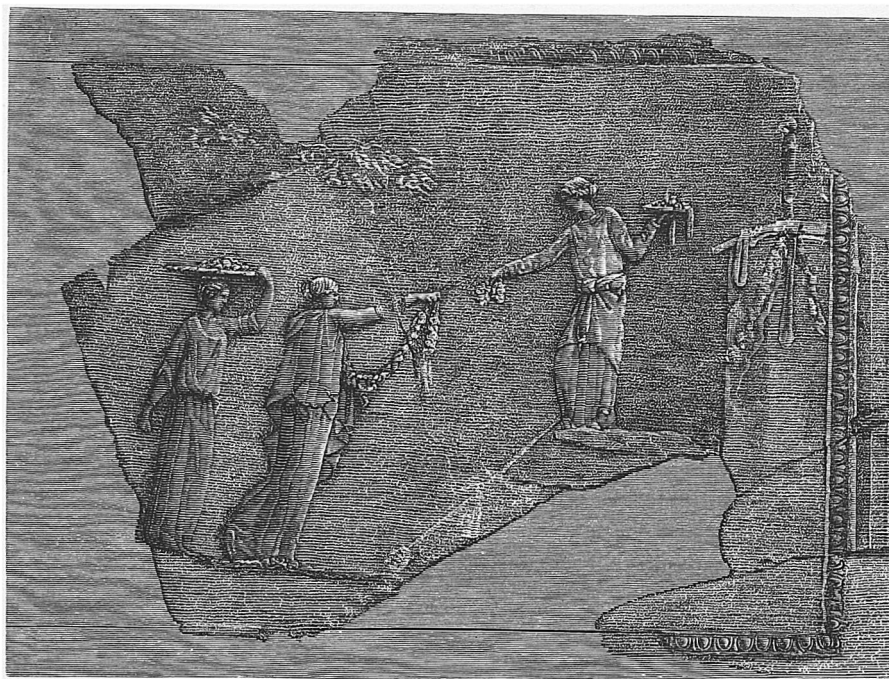


Fig. 7. — FRAGMENT OF A BAS-RELIEF IN STUCCO.

represents the child Bacchus with his nurse and two female figures, somewhat to the rear, near a triumphal arch surmounted by a statue of Silenus. The paintings at each side, supported by two winged genii, are executed in simple outlines on a white ground. In one of them a seated female plays the lyre, while another female offers to her a palm-branch; in the second there are two female figures similarly posed, one of which also plays on a stringed instrument. In the upper part of this instrument there are seen several letters, which have given rise to a learned monograph published last year in the *Gazette Musicale* of Paris, the author of which recognized in these characters the musical notes used by the Greeks.

Mural paintings of this kind on a white ground had never been seen before. Every one remembers the beautiful designs in monochrome on marble tiles from Herculaneum, as well as the paintings from the sarcophagus of Tarquinia, in the Etrusco-Egyptian Museum at Florence, and the admirable vases (*lekythoi*) of Athens, together with other specimens from Nola, or of Campanian manufacture, in which the painters obtained effects of the rarest elegance by means of simple outlines. But these Tiberine paintings stand absolutely by themselves. They reproduce *chefs-d'œuvre* of a time anterior to the imitation of the archaic style, as seen on Greek vases.

I shall not attempt a description of the architectural details on these walls, the upper parts of which are ornamented with victories, young girls of the greatest beauty, as the illustrations which you will no doubt have made from the photographs I send to you will enable your readers to form a better idea of the general arrangement than can be conveyed in words. The wall to the left of the entrance in chamber B (see Fig. 5) is occupied in the centre by a large picture representing, also in outlines on a white ground, with slight shading, the toilet of Venus. The goddess is seated upon a richly decorated seat, her feet resting upon a footstool, while a youthful attendant behind her places a veil on her head, and Cupid stands before her with the grand sceptre. In the lateral compartments Egyptian divinities, etc., placed on a red ground, are treated ornamentally in conjunction with animals and plant forms. Under the frieze a series of marvellous little pictures executed in various colors, and representing scenes from private life, are arranged somewhat after the fashion of metopes.

Another chamber of the same size (D on the plan), and arranged symmetrically with the one just mentioned, is decorated in the same style, the painted "metopes" representing scenes and customs. One of them shows a young girl playing with a tame hare, while, in a second,

another young girl is seated on an elegant marble table. In both of them the forms are remarkable for their purity.

By the side of this second chamber is another small room (E), the entrance to which is from a corridor (F). In this small room little subjects with very elegant figures are introduced among the simpler, but charming architectural designs which divide the walls. One of them, representing a maiden, seated, in the act of pouring perfume from an aryballos into an alabastron, is especially noticeable for its exceptional beauty. The corridor (F) is decorated with marines and landscapes, masterly in execution, and alternating with scenic masks and fruit.

Near the two small rooms already described is a grand hall (G), which has been named the Black Chamber, because the paintings which ornament it are placed upon a black ground. These paintings are very finely executed, and far surpass the black walls of Pompeii, which were so highly praised at the time of their discovery. The upper part is decorated with great festoons and oak branches, attached to elegant colonettes, and above them runs a frieze, in which, in several large compartments, are represented scenes of judgment, each compartment containing a seated personage by whom the judgment is pronounced, while the culprit at his feet holds up the *corpus delicti*. As upon the white ground of the ambulacrum (A), the large divisions of this hall are filled by landscapes fantastically treated, with great power of imagination, and slightly executed *en camaïeu*.

On the pavement of the smaller chambers there was gathered from among the ruins a large quantity of pieces of white stucco in relief, which, as the curvature of their lines clearly demonstrates, belonged to the vaulted ceilings. These pieces, which have been put together with the utmost care, give an exact idea of the magnificence of the ceilings, which necessarily had to be in harmony with the perfect paintings on the walls. The stuccos found here are superior to those on any monuments thus far known. They are veritable cameos of the most beautiful style, and bear the impress of the hand of a master of the first order. The law which governs bas-relief is so admirably observed in them that they may be compared to the best works of the Renaissance. There are among them several human and animal figures which have no equal except in the most delicate works of antique glyptic art. From the photographs of some of the fragments of the stuccoed ceilings of chambers E and B (reproduced in Figs. 1, 2, 6, 7, and the Tail-piece), you can convince yourself of the truth of the statements here made.

I close by saying that these paintings have been skilfully detached from the walls by the most expert artists of Rome and Pompeii, and that in their present shape they form a whole covering about forty metres in superficial measurement. The left wall alone of the Black Chamber (G) has given one piece measuring nearly nine metres.

One of the most important duties which now devolves upon the directors of the excavations is to employ without delay all possible precautions for the permanent preservation of these splendid monuments. Their discovery has most auspiciously inaugurated the excavations of the Tiber.

ALESSANDRO CASTELLANI.

ROME, March, 1880.

